Airs and Ballads

by

John McClure



AIRS AND BALLADS

EDITED BY JOHN McCLURE

THE STAGS' HORNBOOK

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By JOHN McCLURE



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I am indebted to the editors of *Smart Set* for permission to include in this volume the following verses: "Elf's Song," "Chanson Naïve," "Home," "Songs of His Lady," "The Necklace," "Carol," "Song," "Homage," "To a Lady," "I Could Forgive," "Song: Old Style," "Man to Man," "The Celts," "The Needy Poet Invoketh the Gods," "After Reading in a Book of Love Songs," "The Merry Men," "Ego," "The Everlasting Yea," "All They That Pass By," "The Lass of Galilee," and "Finis": to the editor of *Poetry* for permission to include "To His Lady, Philosophy"; and to the editor of *Others* for permission to include "Visitants," "Wanderer," and "Somnambulist." A few of these verses have appeared in the *University of Oklahoma Magazine*.

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JOHN MCCLURE

CONTENTS

Apology	13
Elf's Song	14
Home	15
Songs of His Lady	16
The Necklace	18
Carol	19
Song	20
Homage	21
To a Lady	22
I Could Forgive	23
Gifts	24
Song: Old Style	25
Song	26
His Lady in Absence	27
Deirdre	28
When You Are Old	29
Chanson Naïve	30
I Am Aweary	31
The Lover Turns in His Grave	32
As I Lay Dreaming Abed	33
Man to Man	34
Weary	35
The Dream	36
May-Day	37
To a Lady	38
If I Were the Almighty God	39
Even Unto the Fairies	40
April's Fool	41
The Celts	42

Summer Day 43
Heinrich Heine 44
Columbine 45
Spendthrift 46
The Mad Lady 47
The Needy Poet Invoketh the Gods 48
Poetry 49
Wanderer 50
Visitants 51
Somnambulist 52
The Young Men Speak 53
After Reading in a Book of Love-Songs 54
The Merry Men 55
The Dreamer 56
In the Harvest 57
Carol o' Bethlehem 59
Carol Naïve 60
The Calvary at Boulogne 61
Ego 62
The Grey Leaf 63
The Boon Companion 64
The Wake 65
The Madmen 66
In the End 67
The Everlasting Yea 68
All They that Pass By 69
To His Lady, Philosophy 70
Lady of April 72
The Lass of Galilee 78
Envoy 83
Finis 84

AIRS AND BALLADS

APOLOGY

I am a poetaster
 And my knee I bend
To Marlowe, my master,
 Villon, my friend.

I am a swashbuckler,
 And I break my sword
Before Blake, my tutor,
 Shakespeare, my lord.

I should burn my song-books
 This very day
If singing didn't matter
 So little anyway.

ELF'S SONG

She came in the garden walking
 When shadows begin to steal;
She trod upon a wing o' mine
 And broke it with her heel.

She was a very queen, I think,
 A queen from the West,
I should have only smiled
 Had she stepped on my breast.

But I have told nobody,
 I have told nobody yet!
I have told nobody ——
 Only the violet.

HOME

Your love is all so quiet
 And solemn as the sea:
Like an old song at evening
 It comforts me.

For all the merry mad loves
 That wither and devour
Are paltry by the firelight
 In the quiet hour.

Yea, all the merry mad loves
 That I might have had
When they rise up like cymbals
 Making me sad,

Your love is all so quiet
 It comforts me then,
Like an old song at evening
 Or books of dead men.

I

Oh, I shall pluck the little stars
 And set them in her golden hair,
And I shall pluck for her delight
 All things golden anywhere,

The little flowers of the earth,
 The little corals of the sea,
The little dreams within my heart,—
 My love shall have them all o' me!

II

And I shall weave into a net
 The dreaming Pleiad sisters seven
With all the jewels of all the crowns
 Of all the saints of heaven,—

A net of stars for her to wear
 To make her dainty and fair to see,
So all the princes of all the world
 Shall whisper and envy me.

III

But she shall dress more strangely still:
 In all men's eyes she shall be seen
To wear my little silver dreams
 Like tinkling trinkets of a queen.

Ay, queenlike, she shall move them all
To adoration and desire;
For she shall wear my golden dreams
As though they were a robe of fire.

THE NECKLACE

The songs I made in a hundred towns,
 The songs I made on a hundred ways,
I shall give them all to my love-lady
 To brighten her nights and days.

I shall hang them all on her neck, I swear,
 Like crimson rubies and diamonds white,
A string of jewels for her to wear
 To make her beauty bright!

CAROL

The month can never forget the year;
 The moth can never forget the fire;
And I can never forget my dear
 Lady of High Desire.

The earth can never forget the sun;
 The day can never forget the night;
And I can never forget the one
 Lady of My Delight.

SONG

I watched the sun sink into the sea:
Red as a rose-petal was he.
I watched him come in the morning up,
And he was then like a buttercup.
And twixt the setting and rise of sun
I dreamed all night of my lovely one.

HOMAGE

They follow their steadfast beacons,
 All wanderers save me,
And turn their prayers to Our Lady,
 Mary, Star of the Sea.

I follow in all my journeys
 The will-o'-the-wisp that gleams
Deep in your dark eyes, lady —
 Mother of all my dreams!

They bring red gold to the altar,
 They build great temples of stone,
They render to Cæsar Cæsar's
 And unto God His own.

I, too, give to God and to Cæsar
 What thing to them each belongs,
But yours is my singing heart, lady —
 Mother of all my songs!

TO A LADY

I will give to you diamonds and rubies
And pearls in a golden crown:
For a smile of your grey eyes, lady,
I will tumble a mountain down.

I will give to you garlands and roses,
And fruit of the blossoming year,
Ay, song-books and poems and posies,—
All these will I give you, dear.

I will give you my whole life's treasure,
My flowers of dream and of art —
All things will I give to you, lady.
Saving my heart.

I COULD FORGIVE

Love is so very hard to bear,
 Mad Love on his own pleasure bent,
And yet I think I could forgive
 If he were different.

I could forgive Love's wantonness,
 Forgive that he is blind,
I could forgive Love everything
 If only Love were kind.

GIFTS

I will fetch ye, lady,
 Out of all the earth
Anything to please ye
 Or to make ye mirth.

I will fetch ye silver
 Out of heaven gate,
Fashioned into goblets,
 Beaten into plate.

I will fetch ye red gold
 Tried and tempered well
In white fires of limbo
 And blue fires of hell.

SONG: OLD STYLE

I sang one song upon a time
 To make my lady smile:
O, I hae sung a hundred songs,
 But only one worth-while!

Her smile is like the flush o' dawn,
 Or bursting of a flower:
Her smile is like the moon-rise
 At the midnight hour.

I sang a song upon a time
 That drew a smile frae her:
O, I wouldna barter her smile away
 For white silver.

SONG

Oh, you hear sweet music
 If my love pass,
Whisper o' the crow's-foot,
 Murmur o' the grass!

The wee ones are ready
 To give her due to her
Who is more dainty dainty
 Than the fairies were,

Who is so dainty dainty
 That she doth surpass
Blossom o' the primrose,
 Flower o' the grass!

HIS LADY IN ABSENCE

In cold nights of winter
 When all is cool and still
The white star is my true-love
 And the moonlight on the hill.

But in warm nights of summer
 When evening airs are free
And twilight is like magic
 The new moon is she.

DEIRDRE

I see the sadness
 In her eyes grey
That makes a man pensive
 At dying o' the day,

And I see the paleness
 In her cheeks wan
That makes a man wistful
 At grey dawn.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

Mayhap when you are old and grey
You will remember me,
And nod your white head and say:
" A quaint lean fellow, he.

" I remember the tricks of his speech,
The snatches he used to sing.
I think he said that he loved me
Better than anything."

CHANSON NAÏVE

I shall steal upon her
 Where she sits so white,
Creep-mouse, creep-mouse,
 In the twilight.

She sits in the shadows,
 Dreamy, dreamy —
I shall go stealthily
 So she cannot see me.

I shall steal behind her
 And kiss her on the cheek
And cover up her wee mouth
 So she cannot speak.

I would fain surprise her
 If so be I might,
Creep-mouse, creep-mouse,
 In the twilight!

I AM AWEARY

I am aweary of high loves,
 Aweary of high desire,—
Now I would nod in the evening
 Beside a quiet fire.

When once a man has taken in
 High love into his breast
His heart becomes a crazy wind
 That halteth not for rest.

His soul becomes a thunderstorm,
 His heart a hurricane,
And he is but a windblown leaf
 That will not rest again.

Ay, there is thunder on the land
 And lightning on the sea,
And thunderwrack within their hearts
 For them that lovers be. . . .

So I am aweary of high loves,
 Aweary of high desire;
Now I would nod in the evening
 Beside a quiet fire.

THE LOVER TURNS IN HIS GRAVE

You must not remember
 The dear things I said.
Please forget me, lady,
 Since I am dead.

Like a dream at twilight,
 Like a mist of dawn,
I am dead and gone, lady,
 I am dead and gone.

You must not remember.
 Please, please forget.
You can find a lover
 Kindlier yet.

I cannot hear your mourning,
 Nor know the tears you shed.
Please forget me, lady,
 Since I am dead.

AS I LAY DREAMING ABED

As I lay dreaming abed
 Between the night and the day
It suddenly entered my head
 How all folk are fey.

It suddenly entered my head
 How he and I and she
Would suddenly pass away
 And vanish utterly.

MAN TO MAN

Better it were, my brother,
 You twain had never met,
Then were no hearts broken
 And no dream to forget.

Now you must not remember,
 After you are gone,
The mystic magic of her eyes
 At twilight nor at dawn.

Now you must not remember
 The songs her red lips sing
Of love and lovers' ecstasy
 At dawn or evening.

WEARY

Days were aforetime
 When I sang as ye
Quaint words of loving
 And maid-witchery,

Quaint words of loving
 And two brown eyes,
Mock-tears and laughter
 And sometimes sighs.

But that was in the old days
 Ere I came to see
The shadow in the eyes
 Of a weird lady.

I have tried to sing again
 Since I saw her
Quaint words of loving
 And heart-murmur.

I have tried to sing again,
 But it cannot be.
I am sharply torn and broken
 And sore weary.

THE DREAM

In a strange grove of poplars
 In a strange far place
She came to me between the trees
 With white death on her face.

She came between the poplar trees
 And wandered at my side:
It was beyond the mind of man
 To think that she had died.

It was beyond the mind of man
 Even to dream her dead.
I knew the music of her voice
 In every word she said.

MAY-DAY

A ripple of wild wind-laughter
 Shakes the leaves of the tree,
And I hear the children under it
 Carolling merrily.

" And will ye no' kiss her, Robbie?
 And will ye no' kiss Fifine?
Then are ye a jack-ass, Robbie,
 For she's May Queen! "

" And will ye no' kiss her, Robbie?
 And will ye no' kiss her, say?
Then are ye a jack-ass, Robbie,
 For she's the Queen o' the May! "

Dear God! My little children,
 Gin ye but only knew
Ye wouldna carol so merrily
 To all ye do,

Gin ye but only knew,
 Little lass, little lad —
The little little children
 Make my heart sad.

TO A LADY

Your face is like a child's, lady,
 Whenever you smile just so.
It minds me of the little cherubs
 Of Rafaell' Sanzio.

It minds me of the little angels
 That frolic and chirp and sing
In the golden gardens of heaven
 At God's bidding.

IF I WERE THE ALMIGHTY GOD

If I were the Almighty God
 Sitting in heaven high,
I would barter my starry hood
 For a twinkle of her eye.

I would barter my silver staff,
 My girdle of golden thread,
All for the mischief of her laugh
 Mocking my hoary head.

I would give her eternal space,
 Dappled with stars for flowers,
Where she might wander before my face
 And squander her laughing hours.

Snuck sings:

Violet, loving the shade,
Primrose, loving the sun,
Each is a beautiful maid —
Which is the lovely one?

Snack sings:

I am the love of the violet.
Though by the side of her
You set a diamond, a sapphire — yet
She were the lovelier.

Snick sings:

I am the love of the primrose.
Whatever the blind dogs sing
There is a beauty in my primrose
Beyond all reckoning.

Whereupon a little old withered fairy, who has lived during the life of many violets, during the duration of many primroses, sings:

You that love so the violet,
You that are fond with the rose,
Know you that all love goes?
Even the love of the violet,
Even the love of the rose?

APRIL'S FOOL

I loved a lady once —
 Tweedle-dum, tweedle-di! —
Ah, what a merry dunce
 In the mad world was I.

Love was a fairyland.
 Life was to me
All playing of fiddles
 And minstrelsy.

All the mad world was fair,
 All the trees green,
I was a jester there
 To a gay queen.

I was a knight-at-arms,
 I was a king,
I would brave death for her,
 Caper or sing.

Tweedle-dum, tweedle-di!
What a mad fool was I!

We are the grey dreamers
 With nets of moonlight
That always go a-hunting
 About the fall o' night,

That softly go a-hunting
 In quest of strange birds
With a thin net of moonlight,
 A grey net of words,

That steal through dim forests
 By dark Lethe-streams
With pale snare of moonshine
 And grey bait of dreams,

Until we catch the prize-catch,
 The queer bird we get,
The dreamy, fluttering Soul o' the World
 Caught in a silver net.

SUMMER DAY

I walked upon a little hill
 Where the wind came running by
With quick march-music in my feet
 And a dream before my eye.

I walked among the slender flowers
 That nodded from the grass,
I heard them laugh like city-folk
 To see a poet pass.

And I laughed to the laughing flowers
 And the white clouds in the sky,
And I dreamed a dream and forgot it
 While the wind went running by.

HEINRICH HEINE

Heinrich Heine, Heinrich Heine,
All the trinkets I have wrought
I will bring ye, Heinrich Heine,
Ye beloved good-for-naught!

I will bring ye rhymes like apples,
Rhymes like tarts and cherry-pies,
Dainty rhymes like cherry-blossoms,
Gaudy rhymes like peacocks' eyes,

Rhymes that echo like a prayer,
Rhymes that tinkle like a bell,
Heinrich Heine, Heinrich Heine,
Ye beloved ne'er-do-well!

COLUMBINE

A year agone the rose was gay,
The thorn-tree garmented in green,
The sunshine on the garden lay
And Columbine was queen.

A year agone the birds were here,
Small sparrows piping high and low,
And Pierrot's heart was full of cheer
As it is heavy now,

For now the trees stand barren all,
The petals of the rose are shed,
The moonlight floods the garden wall
And Columbine is dead.

SPENDTHRIFT

I cannot carry my money,
'Tis gone before I know:
I lose coins out of my pocket
Or squander them as I go.

I cannot carry my dreams
Nor barter them for bread:
I squander them like pennies
Or lose them out of my head.

THE MAD LADY

Flowers are springing.
 Wherever we look
Spring comes like a lady
 Out of a book.

With sudden laughter
 Mad Spring is loose —
Just like the lady
 In Mother Goose,

Gaudy and gay
 Through the world she goes
With rings on her fingers
 And bells on her toes.

THE NEEDY POET INVOKETH THE GODS

May all the hidden deities
 Of fair luck befriend
My toe that peepeth coyly
 From my shoe's end!

My toe that peepeth coyly
 Like a wee maid
Void of worldly wickedness
 And somewhat afraid,

My toe that peepeth coyly
 Fearing sore to get
Scratched upon a cobblestone
 Or damnably wet.

May all the hidden deities
 Of fair luck befriend
My toe that peepeth coyly
 From my shoe's end!

POETRY

Poetry? . . .
The voice that leaps up
With the spring-water
And thunders
Out of the mountain.

WANDERER

Why do ye find me in these waters?
Well, the old wander-dog in me whined. . .
So we came, baying at the moon,
Wistfully over the world.

VISITANTS

In the pale hours
Often they come to me stealthily,
Tremulous,
Ghostly with twilight,
Vain as air,—
The wraiths of the gone folk,
Whispering,
Bidding me be of good cheer,
Good hope.

SOMNAMBULIST

Last night I went a-walking with my dreams,
Folk such as ye have never seen the like of,
With faces like moonlight on water,
Wistful folk.
One of them had eyes
The colour of will-o'-the-wisp,
And another had hair
The colour of wind.
We walked in silence
In a grey wood
Until dawn.

Shall they be too stern with us
That we were dazzled by the grey eyes of women?

All the world hath been so —
Centuries ere we came.
It is not our fault.
All the world hath been so
Since time was.

Shall they be too stern with us
That we were tangled beyond all hope
In the long hair of women?

AFTER READING IN A BOOK OF LOVE-SONGS

I wish that some black god of aforetime would
arise out of the earth and damn them
For their singing of women's beauty and quick
passion and love's delight.
I wish that some black god of aforetime would
arise and make wind of these things
And scatter them like quick breaths off the page.
I wish that this would happen with the sudden-
ness of death and disaster
Because of the wild beauty of their songs.

THE MERRY MEN

I love the farce men —
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a! —
They that go skipping
With light laughter
Bound to no woman,
They that are as goats
In the world
Knowing not sadness.
I love the farce men —
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a!

THE DREAMER

My ears are battered night and day
 By a merry horde that sings
In ballad and in roundelay
 Of kindly earthly things.

And sure, I shall love forever
 A gentle or thundering song,
But I — I can never sing rarely
 Because I have dreamed too long.

Good sooth, I have lost it wholly,
 The frolicsome human touch!
Nay, I — I can never sing good songs
 Because I have dreamed too much.

IN THE HARVEST

The sun shines hot from a clear sky.
I laugh and lay my pitchfork by.
Why work for food and drink and bed
When one has dreams within one's head?
In this world it is best to sit
In silence and consider it.
Ay, while the slipshod minutes flee,
This is the sweetest work for me,
To lie a-dreaming dreamily
And watch great God Almighty's fleet
Drive slowly over the fields of wheat —
With a salt sea-song in my throat
Lie belly-upward, taking note
How solemnly go by
Those galleys of the sky.

The little ants among the grass
Upon their daily routine pass.
The farmer lads make the wheat fly.
Say, do I envy them? Not I.
The horses that the reaper pull
Know not the world is beautiful.

I watch the great white clouds go by
Like ships across the open sky
Until a magic memory
Of sounding surge comes back to me,

And here, forgetful of it all —
The busy men, the farmer's call —
I lie a-dreaming dreamily
About the sea-gulls and the sea.

CAROL O' BETHLEHEM

Mary stood at the manger-side
With her elbows on the rim;
He smiled the whimsical sweet smile
That shamed the cherubim,
Then straightway tossed His little legs,—
The hay-pricks tickled Him.

Mary laughed and bent down low —
Mary, blessed of God's grace! —
He curled His little pink toes up
And gurgled in her face:
Then pulled her hair right sturdily
In that calm holy place.

Ay, Jesus was a baby too,
And plucked His Mother's hair.—
She loved Him much more thus, I ween,
Than as King anywhere.

Was never none other
Like our God's Mother.

I sing the Lady of all most fair,
Of all most dainty and debonair,
She to whose feet the angels come,—
Lady Mary of God's Kingdom!

I sing the Lady of all most good,
Immaculate Lady of Motherhood,
She that holdeth our hearts in fee,—
Lady Mary of God's City!

I sing the Lady of all most dear,
She that cherished us yesteryear,
She that will cherish when this world dies,—
Lady Mary of Paradise!

Yet was never none so fair,
Yet was never none so good,
On the green earth anywhere
As Our Lady of Motherhood.—

Yet never none other
Like our God's Mother.

THE CALVARY AT BOULOGNE

At Boulogne-by-the-Sea
Christ Jesus startled me.

I saw upon a hill
 His cross against the sky
Peering toward the sea
 Where the swift ships went by.

He peered toward the sea
 With his sad face
Waiting for his folk to come
 From a far place,

Waiting for his folk to come
 Which they never will —
Peering toward the grey sea
 From a high hill.

My members wither like weeds.—
 Yea, as all matter must,
My blood and my hair and my tender eyes,
 And my heart, are coming to dust.

And the trees and the hills and the flowers,
 And the planets that sail the skies,
The worlds, with the years and the hours,
 Wither to wind likewise.

These make my visible garment,
 And go fast fleeting away.
But I am not startled or daunted,
 Who know I am greater than they.

THE GREY LEAF

Lo, the sea-tides eternally seek
 What they shall not find:
And the worlds — though they struggle to speak,
 They are tongueless and blind —
 But I — I am not of their kind!

Night — wind and the night —
 What though the stars are at play
And rustles the wind in delight
 As it waits for the coming of day! —
 Lo, I am more happy than they.

For the stars they must twinkle on
 And always the wind must blow:
Ever when I am gone
 They shall twinkle and bluster so.—
 But I — I have come and I go.

Were the earth but lighter upon him
 My sorrow were lighter too;
Then might I strew on him willow
 And flowers of purple and blue,

Ay, twine on his grave green willow
 And flowers, and let him be,—
The noblest, brave good-fellow
 Ever walked on the road with me.

THE WAKE

In the little house across the street
A man is lying dead,
Two watchers sitting at his feet,
A watcher at his head.

He lies quite quietly, I ween,
In his grave-clothes cut so trim,
For he to the world is nothing at all,
And the world is nothing to him.

But though his breath have taken flight,
His merry soul be gone,
Of all the dead in the world tonight,
He is hardly the only one.

I lie here also in my bed,
Who would as well have died,
With two dreams watching at my head
And one dream at my side.

THE MADMEN

And still the madmen scream
That the world is but a dream.

They know far more than we
Who take it seriously.

An we would hark to such,
I swear we could learn much.

Ay, one day we shall scream
That it is but a dream.

IN THE END

Now God has forgot
The dream that He had:
The world is not,
It is gone like mad.

And He lies asleep
While the grey winds leap,
The grey winds race
Through space.

Always the world is beautiful.
Spring comes and with it the rose.
" But what of the roses that bloomed and fell?
Singer of songs, what of those? "

Always the dream is beautiful.
Spring! and the lovers are come!
" But what of the lovers that loved and died?
Ah, singer of songs, thou art dumb! "

Dumb am I? *Dumb* am I? Fool that thou art!
Spring comes with the whirl of the year,
And the old old roses, the old old dream,
And the old old lovers are here.

ALL THEY THAT PASS BY

I heard the Salvation Army
 Beating their praying-drum
On the crowded street of the city
 Where the mad folk go and come,

Blowing their praying-trumpet,
 Calling our ears to their crier
Telling about the judgment of God
 To set the world on fire,

Blowing their praying-trumpet,
 Beating their praying-drum,
Kneeling to God in terror,
 Calling to sinners " Come! "

And oh, they were terribly earnest,
 Bowed in a solemn row
At the side of the city side-walk
 Where the world-mad come and go.

But they gazed with wistful faces
 On many a laughing eye.
It seemed there was no use praying
 Where the painted ladies went by.

TO HIS LADY, PHILOSOPHY

I

The beautiful ladies of old time
That walked like angels and were as fair
Are dead and vanished and no man's rhyme
Can paint them truly as once they were.
Like pale shadows in moonlight
Vanished they are upon strange ways
Sudden as snow — Villon was right —
The beautiful ladies of old days.
But you stay always, you most dear,
Though the harlots come and the harlots go,
Walking in pomp and in great show,
Still you are with me, still are here,
More faithful far in a thousand ways
Than the beautiful ladies of old days.

II

One thing I know most certainly,
You will not pester me nor chide:
You will not quarrel much nor be
Unkind or hasty to deride
When I am stupid with my dreams.
You will not cackle much nor joke
When I am dazzled by the gleams
Of fen-fires in a world of smoke
Or somewhat silly and insane
About the making of a song,

Nor mock me that my face is plain,
Nor chide me that I am not strong.
Nay, kinder than a woman is,
You will not mock my vagaries.

III

When all my heart is laden down
With worldly worries, worldly fears,
You will not pucker lip nor frown
Nor make me gloomier with tears.
You will not make my sorrow sad
With weeping and with wretchedness
When all the goods I ever had
Have vanished in the market's press.
You will not sob nor make a scene
When I come sadly home at night
To tell you that my hopes have been
Blown and blasted out of sight.
We two will light our pipe o' clay
And laugh and blow the world away.

LADY OF APRIL

I

Songs were delight of life five years agone.
My dreams, a-flutter on the wings of rhyme,
Circled to heaven, battling with the dawn,
Giddy as sky-larks in the olden time.
Now songs come slowly, and no more sublime
O'er-topping dreams blot out the moon and sun
As in old days when creeping prose was crime
And verse a duty. Now my dreams are done.
And yet I think I might go singing yet,—
Ay, might make merry with a random rhyme
And weave quaint phrases to a minuet,
Coining sweet music out of fleeting time,
If you would listen to me and be glad
And take with laughter what few songs I had.

II

I had rebuked myself most reverendly
And said: "Tut! Let love vanish!" I had said:
"Love is a madness, an insanity.
Forget it wholly." Now, discomfited,
I wonder how it came about at all
That I forgot all learning and all sense
And fell a-laughing and grew musical,
Loving you gaily, with no recompense.

"Tut! Let love vanish?" Faith, I will, my
dear,
Let this love vanish, and with little care,
In that august apocalyptic year
When earth and ocean vanish into air.
"Tut! Let love vanish!" said I? Faith, I
will
When stars are ashes and the suns stand still.

III

I have no riches. I have never had
Great store of gems — bright, gay and glittering
glass.
I cannot give you jewels, dear, nor spread
Silver and gold before you as you pass.
I have no domain neither on the earth.
I own no meadows, and can never pick
Rich buttercups and daisies for your mirth,
Bluebells and pinks, and violets clustered thick.
Nay, I can only give, as I have done,
In lieu of gold and silver and rare gem,
Stray wisps of dream and fancy quaintly spun
To weave and broider in your garment's hem.
In lieu of roses, on your brow I set
Flowers of dream in a vague coronet.

IV

Longtime before the world grew old and grey,
Wearied with wars and wistful for its end,

There was a man in lordly Nineveh
Sang sonnets of a lady. Swift as wind
His like have followed him in Babylon,
Tall Troy and Rome, Memphis and Ispahan,
A pack of poets piping one by one
Sonnets of ladies, since the world began.
A million buried who sang songs onetime
Crowd round me eager and importune me
To set your beauty in enamell'd rhyme,
Patterned with care and carven cunningly.—
The world is old, but merry. They are dead.
Yet Love lives ever, and I sing instead.

V

And thus I build a house of beauty, sweet,
A house of loveliness for you alone,
Setting my words like marble, trim and neat,
My mortar, music, binding stone to stone.
I build it firmly that it may endure
Somewhile beyond us, if the gods be good,
That you may stand most queenly and secure
Therein forever, as you surely should.
When lean Oblivion in aftertimes
Shall come to call you to his kingdom, dear,
Then shall you stand in these embattled rhymes
Safe from his onslaughts for a thousand year.—
The gods are laughing. Well they know that I
And my mad sonnets and yourself shall die.

VI

Nay, these trim rhymes shall not live overlong
Nor make men wonder after I am dead.
I cannot thunder such a sturdy song
As I have whimsied in my giddy head.
I say, " This shall not perish! " and I pen
Some prattle neat and prim of thee and me,
Better mayhap than some by better men,
Yet empty still and wrought too curiously.
Sure, the queer tinkling of these little words
Shall sound no longer ere Time tyrant kills
Than the faint sheep-bells of the mountain herds
Tinkling one moment in the eternal hills.
Yet frail, uncomely children that they are
I pray you take them: be their comforter.

VII

Saint Francis of Assisi — may he rest
Quiet eternal in his holy grave —
Said: " In the wonders of the east and west,
The mellow moonlight, and the restless wave
Of the salt ocean, and the midnight sky,
The winds of morning and the fallow sod,
I see as in a dream eternally
The changing shadow of Almighty God."
The world to me is but a mighty dream
Wherein the picture of your beauty gleams and dies:
I find yourself reflected even with Him

In earth, air, water, and the winds and skies.
Godwot, Saint Francis was a holy friar,
And I a blásphemer,— but yet no liar.

VIII

That pearl that Cleopatra wantonly
Dissolved in wine and drank for her delight:
Those gems the mad Doge threw into the sea
Twinkling against the sunset on a summer's night:
Those gems, were lost by a lone traveller
Crossing the desert to the prophet's tomb:
All lost bright trinkets, dear, that ever were
Or ever shall be till the shock of doom:
These will I gather from the world of dreams
— Who find no gems nor jewels otherwhere —
And lock them with their weird unearthly gleams
Cunningly in a casket made of air
Clasped with a wisp of music strange and sweet,
And lay them (all my riches) at your feet.

IX

When men come by me with complaining hearts,
" Life is so little worth, so little worth,
Thinner than moonshine —" suddenly there starts
A storm within me of great joy and mirth.
Life is so little worth then, dear? Nay, nay!
I cry them silence. Have the fools forsworn
The winds and flowers and the sunlit day,
Moonlight and starlight, and the flush of morn?

I shall not join their melancholy throng
Now nor forever, sweet, I who have had
Gifts rare and wonderful to make me glad,
Sunrise and sunset, reverie and song
The plains, the seas, the rainfall and the dew,
The midnight sky, the mountain heights — and
you.

He often said my lips were sweet. He said
There was no peace to be had in the world
Like that to be had of a woman.
He said
Wonderful beautiful things about my eyes.
And I laughed like a child, believing him,
Because he was always so tender.
I forgot my mother and father and all the world,
Believing him, because he was always so wistful. . . .
He was no money-maker. He was no good carpenter.
But I loved him.

He was always so wistful and silent.
He talked but little. When he spoke
His words were soft like whispering.
There was music in them like that of leaves,
Tender and sad.
He said that he loved me.
My heart had become a dream about little children.
He was no good carpenter.
Yet he might have earned money one day.
My heart had become a dream
Tremulous with the patter of little feet

And whisper of children. . . .
He was always so wistful and silent.

There was always a sadness in his eyes
When he kissed me, a very great sadness.
I think he was never altogether happy with me:
Yet he said that he loved me. . . .
He was so wistful.
He read in great books
And talked of things I could not understand.
There was always a sadness in his eyes
That I could find no reason for.

Sometimes it seemed that he could not kiss me
enough.
He said there was no peace in the world
Like that to be had of a woman.
Yet still he was sad.
When I smiled, he smiled too —
But it was so wistful.
When I laughed with the happiness of loving him,
He smiled.
But it made him seem so much older than I.
He said I was like a little bird
That laughed without knowing the reason. . . .
He seemed so old,
So much older than I.
But he said my lips were warm.
He loved wet kisses. . . .

I think he had known few women.
But when he told me that he had known none
I knew that he lied.
All men are one. . . .

He read in great books.
I was afraid even in those days
He would forget me.
He was too sad to remember a woman.
I wept at nights then
With thinking of it. . . .

Yet he said that he loved me.
Once he smiled.
He said the little flowers with white petals
Smiled all day,
And was he less than a flower?
But he was sad again in no time.
Mostly when he smiled,
I felt like weeping. . . .

He needed taking care of.
He was so wistful and helpless.
He was no good carpenter.

One evening he came and sat with me a long time
And said nothing.
That night he was more tender than my mother.
Next morning they came to me and said:

" He is gone. In the direction of Samaria.
Preaching his dreams."
I never saw him again. . . .

They say he would let no one mention my name. . . .

Now always I sit with my mother and spin.
The young men of Nazareth come often
Trying to talk with me.
They are good carpenters.
They come always trying to talk.
But they are nothing to me. . . .

Folk say he would let no one mention my name. . . .

He wanted to save the world,
Preaching his dreams.
He did not save it.
Men here where he lived are evil still.
The men on the other side of the mountains are evil as ever.
There is no good in the world.
He did not save it. . . .

He said that he loved me.
My heart had become a dream about little children.
My heart had become a dream

Tremulous with the patter of little feet
And whisper of children. . . .

Now always I sit with my mother and spin.
They told me five years ago
He was crucified in Jerusalem.

ENVOY

Prince, all the scholarly men that write
In the daytime, and drink by night,
Come to the same end, sometime die:
 Even you, even I.
Along that shadowy way have gone
Robert Browning and Frank Villon,
Robert Browning that was so strong,
François, night-bird, maker of song —
For Death he taketh them all along.

FINIS

I have fought no mighty fight;
 I have not affronted Fate;
I have kept no fire alight
 Pale within no temple-gate.

I have not done anything
 That is noble, brave or true;
Nay, I cannot even sing
 Rondels beautiful or new.

I have not been worth my bread.
 Yet thus much I beg in fee,
When I lie among the dead
 Folk may murmur this o' me:

" Here lies one within the tomb —
 Pencil stilled and parchment furled —
Who was somewhat overcome
 By the beauty of the world."

THE END

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